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PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN LAOS TO JULY 1956

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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Concurred in by the

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PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN LAOS TO JULY 1956

THE PROBLEM

To estimate probable trends in relations between the Royal government and the Pathet Lao over the next six months with particular reference to the military intentions and capabilities of the two sides. (A discussion of the political, economic, and military situation in Laos is contained in NIE 63.3-55, dated 26 July 1955. The present paper updates the basic discussion of Royal government-Pathet Lao capabilities, and the activities of the International Control Commission. Although the conclusions of NIE 63.3-55 remain valid in all important respects, this estimate provides further elaboration of its conclusions, particularly paragraph 6.)

CONCLUSIONS

1. The government of Laos is concerned that unless it soon suppresses the Pathet Lao a de facto partitioning of the country may occur. It is becoming increasingly impatient with a policy of inaction as a result of prolonged and fruitless negotiations with the Pathet Lao. However, the Royal government could probably be induced to postpone action for some time as a result of pressures from the Western Powers or the International Control Commission, and in the belief that Pathet Lao morale is declining. Its eventual course is likely to be influenced largely by its ability to obtain reliable air transport and by its estimates of the Viet Minh reaction and the prospects for US or SEATO support. However, even lack of airlift or Western support may not deter the Royal government from launching an offensive. (*Paras. 10, 23-24*)

2. We believe that against Pathet forces alone, Royal government forces have the capability to contain Pathet attacks and, with adequate air transport, to occupy

the main centers and lines of communication in the provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly. (*Para. 17*)

3. We believe that the Communists are determined to maintain their position in Sam Neua and Phong Saly provinces, and that Viet Minh troops will intervene to the extent necessary to maintain the Pathet Lao. Following the 25 December elections, which it is boycotting as illegal, the Pathet Lao may formalize its separate status by setting up a government in its areas of control. However, a serious Pathet Lao effort to drive the Royal troops out of Phong Saly and Sam Neua provinces appears inconsistent with general Communist policy in Asia, since it would require participation in combat areas of Viet Minh forces which would be susceptible to detection. Nevertheless, Pathet Lao-Viet Minh forces might undertake such action in view of the probable Communist estimate that military action limited to the two disputed

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provinces will not elicit effective Western reaction and might therefore demonstrate to the Thai and South Vietnamese that SEATO is an uncertain guarantee against Communist military pressure and subversion. (*Paras. 16, 21*)

4. We believe that, under the circumstances now existing, the most likely development will be a gradual build-up in the scale and intensity of hostilities in northern Laos over the next six months. There appears to be little likelihood of an effective cease-fire. Each side will attempt to consolidate and extend its position; but, barring unauthorized action by Royal Lao military commanders, neither side is likely to launch a large-scale offensive. There will probably be an increase in the size of the forces involved, including increased Viet Minh support of the Pathet Lao. In this situation there will be serious danger of sizeable Royal Lao forces being cut off and captured by more experienced Pathet-Viet Minh formations. The government might then feel compelled to request military assistance from SEATO or the US to maintain its position in the disputed provinces and to prevent a decline in anti-Pathet resolution throughout Laos. (*Para. 27*)

5. If increased military action led to a defeat for Royal government forces or their ejection from the disputed provinces, morale in the rest of Laos, particularly in government circles, would decline. The Thai might feel that failure to sup-

press the Pathet was due in part to indecision by the US; and, barring a US security commitment, concern over their own security would increase. South Vietnamese apprehensions would also increase, although Diem would feel that Communist violations of the Geneva Agreements would reduce foreign criticism of his refusal to discuss elections with the Viet Minh. India's acquiescence in the de facto partitioning of Laos might be interpreted by the Communists as evidence that Nehru was unwilling to make an issue of gradual Communist advances in Southeast Asia. The Communists and some Southeast Asian governments would also tend to conclude that SEATO was not prepared to act. (*Para. 28*)

6. In the event of large-scale hostilities, the ICC would probably demand a cease-fire with a withdrawal of both sides to previously held positions. The question of which side initiated fighting must inevitably be hazy under circumstances prevailing in the area. The Indian ICC representatives will almost certainly insist that the status quo be preserved in the two provinces until the two sides are able to reach an agreed political settlement. The Indians remain sensitive to US involvement and would probably construe any US supply operations to Lao forces in the two provinces, under conditions of enlarged fighting, as violations of the Geneva Agreements. (*Para. 29*)

DISCUSSION

I. CURRENT SITUATION

7. The Geneva Agreements of 1954 proclaimed the territorial integrity of Laos and recognized the sovereignty of the Royal Laotian

government over the entire territory. The agreements provided, however, for the grouping of Pathet Lao fighting units in the two northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam

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Neua, pending the reintegration of such units into the national community. The Royal government pledged not to permit the introduction of foreign troops or establishment of bases, beyond existing arrangements with France, or to adhere to alliances "so long as its security is not threatened." Although Laos is within the area of the SEATO guarantees, it is not a member of the pact and has thus far preferred to rely on the International Control Commission rather than SEATO to deal with the Pathet Lao problem.

8. Following the regroupment of Pathet Lao units in the fall of 1954, the Royal government sought by direct negotiations with the Pathet Lao to secure entry for and recognition of government administrators in the Pathet groupment area. Meanwhile the government increased the strength of its armed forces already in the Pathet Lao area. The Pathets, allegedly because of the absence of a political settlement, have denied Royal jurisdiction in the north; and frequent armed clashes occurred as the Pathets sought to maintain a secure base.

9. Partly because of Premier Katay's belief that the Pathets could be persuaded to cast off their Viet Minh leadership and return to the fold, partly because of pressure from the ICC, the UK, and France, and partly because of basic military deficiencies, the Royal government prolonged the political negotiations and continued its efforts to arrange an acceptable cease-fire within Sam Neua and Phong Saly. Its latest effort to demonstrate good faith in negotiation led to inconclusive meetings with the Pathet Lao leader Souphanouvong during October in Rangoon.

10. It became increasingly evident to the Royal government, however, that political negotiations were fruitless and that the real Pathet Lao objective was the establishment of a secure base for the eventual subversion or overrunning of all Laos. The government finally declared on 10 November 1955 that further negotiations appeared futile, and announced its intention to proceed with national elections in December in all areas under its control. Since that time government leaders, particularly among the military, have increas-

ingly turned their attention to the possibilities of forceful action to re-establish Royal government authority in the north. There may be a feeling in Laos that unless the Pathets are eliminated there will be a tendency among the great powers to accept a de facto partition of their country.

11. More recently, the Royal government has reported increased Pathet military activity, which it regards as preparatory for an offensive. The Pathet Lao actually conducted a large probing attack against Royal Laotian forces in Sam Neua province on 5 December, and it is possible that the Pathets intend a series of attacks against Royal forces within Phong Saly and Sam Neua in the near future.

12. In the event of major hostilities the Pathet Lao could employ their 6,300 regular troops, comprising 11 infantry battalions and one heavy weapons battalion. These are supported by up to 1,000 Viet Minh "advisers," and by a local militia totalling up to 3,000 partially armed troops. Two-thirds of the Pathet Lao regular forces are deployed in Sam Neua province, where seven infantry battalions and the heavy weapons battalion are located. The other four infantry battalions and other detachments, totalling about 1,900 troops, are in Phong Saly province. A total of 18,000 Viet Minh troops, comprising two infantry regiments, a border security regiment, and one infantry division, are deployed in North Vietnam along routes leading into northern Laos. These units could be moved into northern Laos with little or no advance warning.

13. Pathet Lao units are lightly armed, mobile, and effective in the guerrilla tactics particularly suited to the terrain of northern Laos. There are firm indications that Pathet Lao morale is deteriorating and that economic and health conditions in their zone are appreciably poorer than in the rest of Laos. The Communists appear to have little spontaneous popular support, and there may have been some low-echelon friction between Pathet Lao troops and their Viet Minh advisers. These factors are probably compensated for in part by intensive Communist indoctrination and firm discipline. On balance, the Pathet Lao

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troops are probably on a par qualitatively with those of the Lao National Army. The combat effectiveness of any Viet Minh forces which might be committed in northern Laos would be superior to that of the Pathet Lao because of their better armament, battle experience, and indoctrination.

14. The Pathet Lao military forces are effectively controlled by the Viet Minh, and the Pathet Lao almost certainly would not undertake any major offensive action without Viet Minh, and ultimately Chinese Communist, approval. In addition to advisory personnel, the Viet Minh provides the Pathet Lao with weapons, probably including some artillery, and furnishes ammunition and other equipment on a continuing basis from depots in the Dien Bien Phu, Moc Chau, and Hoi Xuan areas. There are no indications that Chinese Communist personnel are with the Pathet Lao forces, but minor Chinese Communist logistical support may be directly available to the Pathet Lao in Phong Saly province. Frequent reports of Viet Minh units in the Pathet Lao area remain unconfirmed, but small Viet Minh detachments may be deployed along lines of communication into both provinces, and in major rear depot areas.

15. Royal government forces total 27,700 of which 25,000 are in the Lao National Army (ANL), and 2,700 in the Lao National Guard. The army is composed of 16 infantry battalions, 1 parachute infantry battalion, 1 artillery training battalion, 2 armored reconnaissance companies, and 35 commando companies. Almost two-thirds of the regular army units and more than half of the National Guard companies are deployed in northern Laos. In Phong Saly province, there are six commando companies plus some 3,000-4,000 partially armed progovernment partisans. These could be supported by the 3 infantry battalions, 1 commando company, and 5 National Guard companies located in Luang Prabang province. There are five infantry battalions and 14 commando companies, a total of 5,200 troops, in Sam Neua province, with the parachute battalion, three commando companies, and three National

Guard companies in adjacent Xieng Khouang province. Three battalions each are located in central and southern Laos.

16. The ANL has no permanent tactical organization above battalion level and no combat-ready heavy weapons or artillery units. It is understaffed, inexperienced, and dependent on French advisers and other foreign assistance for training and maintenance of equipment. The over-all performance of units in combat has been uneven. Morale is only fair despite a frequently aggressive outlook within the youthful officer corps. The army is almost completely dependent on air transport to resupply its forces in the disputed provinces. There are now available to the Royal government only nine C-47's, all of which are operated by French crews and four of which were allocated to the French under MDAP. In the event of generalized hostilities in these provinces the French would almost certainly withdraw their air support unless the French became involved through SEATO. The military position of the Royal government would be improved if arrangements work out for reliable air transport.

17. We believe that against Pathet forces alone Royal government forces have the capability to contain Pathet attacks and, with adequate air transport, to occupy the main centers and lines of communication in the provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly. However, we believe that if the Pathet position should be seriously threatened by Royal government attacks, or by the undermining of the Pathet Lao organization, the Viet Minh would almost certainly intervene to the extent necessary to preserve the Pathet Lao.

18. Viet Minh intervention would be difficult to identify in the guerrilla-type warfare that would take place in the difficult terrain of northern Laos. If the Viet Minh did intervene, large numbers of Royal troops could be cut off and captured in these areas. In such an event, the government would probably feel compelled eventually to request military assistance from the US or SEATO. Only visible evidence of SEATO or US intention to intervene would be likely to induce the Viet Minh to abandon military support of the Pathet Lao.

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19. The International Control Commission has long encouraged the Royal government to continue political negotiations with the Pathet in the hopes of avoiding a military showdown. As the prospects for Pathet Lao acceptance of Royal authority and an agreement on terms for Pathet Lao participation in the December national elections have dwindled, the Indian chairman of the ICC has become increasingly reconciled to a de facto partitioning of Laos. The Canadian member continues to support the Royal government's right to jurisdiction over the disputed territory. The British and French, both of whom are able to influence Laotian leaders, are also strongly opposed to military action by the Royal government. Although they recognize that unless the Pathet Lao is suppressed, it will probably eventually emerge as a rival claimant to power over all Laos, they prefer this delayed threat to the immediate prospect of an armed conflict that might force SEATO to intervene or be discredited. The Indians feel that to make an issue of Pathet violation of the Geneva Accords would be inconsistent with failure to make an issue of Diem's refusal to open face-to-face consultations with the Viet Minh, and the British are influenced by the Indian and Communist linking of the two issues. Among all these states there is a pervading desire not to permit the Laos issue to boil over and interfere with prospects for reducing tensions in the Far East.

II. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

20. The relative military weakness of the Pathet Lao and the probable reluctance of the Viet Minh to become engaged on such a scale as to risk SEATO or US intervention will probably serve to limit Communist military action to the disputed provinces of Laos. A continuation and expansion of local Pathet Lao attacks appears likely over the next few months. Such attacks might be designed to increase pressure for a resumption of negotiations, to raise the morale of their own forces, to counter the activities of government forces, or to underline Pathet Lao claims that the December election is illegal in the absence of a political settlement. Following the elections, which it is boycotting, the Pathet Lao may formalize

its separate status by setting up a government in its areas of control. The Communists may also anticipate an eventual stiffening of the Western position in Laos and may desire to consolidate their own position before effective Western measures to bolster the Royal government can be implemented.

21. A serious Pathet Lao effort to drive the Royal troops out of Phong Saly and Sam Neua provinces appears inconsistent with general Communist policy in Asia, since it would require participation of Viet Minh forces in combat which would be susceptible to detection. However, Pathet Lao-Viet Minh forces might undertake such action in view of the probable Communist estimate that military action limited to the two northern provinces will not elicit effective Western reaction and might therefore demonstrate to the Thai and South Vietnamese that SEATO is an uncertain guarantee against Communist military pressure and subversion.

22. The failure of the Royal government to seize the opportunity offered by the recent Pathet Lao attack to undertake a general offensive indicates that no such action is contemplated at least until after the elections on 25 December. The outcome of these elections is uncertain, beyond the probability that few candidates subject to Pathet Lao influence will be elected. Following the election, problems of party alignments and personal position may occupy the attention of government leaders for a brief period. However, concern with the Pathet Lao problem is almost certain again to become paramount. Basic government policy towards the Pathet Lao is unlikely to be affected by the election, although a diminution in Premier Katay's influence might result in a bolder policy.

23. If the Pathets do not launch an offensive, pressures from the Western Powers and the ICC plus the belief that Pathet Lao morale is declining, would probably induce the Laotian government to postpone action. We believe, however, that the Royal government will become increasingly impatient with a policy of inaction. Its eventual course of action is likely to be influenced largely by its ability to obtain reliable air transport from US or

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will attempt to seize Sam Neua and Phong Saly by force, particularly so long as such a move is deterred by the presence of the ICC, is actively discouraged by France and the UK, and lacks the full support of the US.

28. In the absence of direct military action by the Lao government, the Pathet Lao will probably tighten its control over Sam Neua and Phong Saly. The capability of Pathet Lao security forces will probably be improved, primarily as a result of DRV material and advisory assistance. Moreover, sizeable DRV military units readily available to support the Pathet Lao will continue to be stationed on the Laos-Tonkin border. Elements of these units might be infiltrated to support the Pathet Lao if the Communists consider that their control of the provinces is threatened.

29. The Pathet Lao will probably continue to seek to develop popular support and guerrilla bases throughout Laos, and to weaken and discredit the Lao government and its leaders. Although it will probably have some success in these efforts, the Pathet Lao almost certainly will not develop sufficient popular appeal or military strength during the period of this estimate to gain control of Laos.

30. Pathet Lao in its negotiations with the Lao government, will continue to seek participation, in some manner, in a coalition government for all of Laos. It will probably also continue its propaganda to have its area and candidates included in the national elections scheduled for December 1955. The Pathet Lao will not be willing to accept any proposal which weakens its control of Phong Saly and Sam Neua. Unless directed to do so for reasons of Bloc strategy, the Pathet Lao is unlikely to launch attacks southward from its present areas or to initiate general guerrilla warfare throughout Laos during the period of this estimate. However, the Pathet Lao, possibly reinforced by infiltrated DRV regulars, will probably continue its military efforts to force the small isolated Royal Lao Army garrisons to withdraw from Sam Neua and Phong Saly.

31. The Lao government almost certainly will not be able to solve the Pathet Lao problem by

force during the period of this estimate. In the unlikely event that the Lao government should attempt to regain control of the two northern provinces by force, the DRV would probably covertly provide military units sufficient to prevent the destruction of the Pathet Lao. Although the Lao government may be able by covert means to develop an anti-Communist resistance effort in Pathet Lao territory, such resistance will probably not weaken Pathet Lao forces significantly or threaten Communist control of the northern provinces.

32. In the longer run, if the Pathet Lao is not suppressed by force, the best that the Lao government can hope to accomplish is to increase its military and police effectiveness and popular support sufficiently to prevent the spread of Pathet Lao influence. The long-range prospects for achieving this limited objective appear slightly better than even if Laos receives timely economic, technical, and military assistance. However, the chances would be greatly reduced if South Vietnam fell under DRV control.

IV. CIVIL AND SECURITY FUNCTIONS

33. In the past, the Lao government has been fairly effective in maintaining internal security and performing the normal functions of government — primarily because of the absence of any basic social or economic discontent among the population and because of the apparent docility and carefree temperament of the Lao people. However, the government is poorly equipped to meet the new tests presented by Communist infiltration and subversion and by increased independence. The government has only been partially effective in exercising the responsibilities previously held by French officials. The withdrawal of French personnel is particularly damaging to the effective administration of the Interior and Defense ministries, public works, higher education, public health, and the treasury.

34. The Lao Army, with a total strength of 29,000, including 5,000 National Guard, is poorly trained, logistically weak, and badly led. The regular forces include 18 infantry

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battalions, 1 parachute battalion, 2 armed reconnaissance companies, and approximately 24 commando companies. The embryonic Laotian air force does not have and, during the period of this estimate, will not develop a combat capability.

35. Since the Geneva Agreements, the effectiveness of the army has been considerably reduced as a result of the partial withdrawal of French cadres from Lao combat units, and the general transfer of command authority and responsibility at all levels to Laotians. The army is understaffed, and its ability to plan and execute military operations effectively is directly dependent on the ability and willingness of the French military mission to influence and direct such operations.

36. The French Military Advisory Mission to Laos, whose strength is limited to 1,500 by the Geneva Agreement, has a current strength of about 1,150. Approximately 80 percent of the French mission personnel are engaged in positions involving command and staff functions, primarily in technical and logistical services. The feeling of independence afforded the Lao Army by the relinquishment of French control in July 1954 has led to a tendency by Lao officers to disregard the advice of French advisors and to resent the presence of French officers in positions of leadership. A serious morale problem has apparently arisen among French personnel who find themselves working in an unfriendly atmosphere. This condition aggravates the weakness of the Lao Army.

37. In addition to the Advisory Mission, the French are also permitted to maintain a force of 3,500 combat troops at two bases in Laos for the defense of that country. At present the French have only about 1,000 troops (one battalion plus necessary service troops) maintaining one base at Seno in central Laos. This force could be readily reinforced by air to the authorized strength, but even at full strength this small contingent could not be considered an effective deterrent to any strong invading force.

38. Given Franco-Lao cooperation in planning together with French logistic support of

operations, the Lao Army probably has the capability either to defend Laos against an attack by Pathet Lao forces or to attack and seize the major population and communication centers in Phong Saly and Sam Neua provinces. However, the army could not prevent the infiltration of Pathet Lao guerrilla forces into other areas of Laos, or completely suppress the Pathet forces in the two northern provinces. If the Pathet Lao was supported by substantial DRV forces, the Lao Army, even with full support of French forces permitted in Laos by the Geneva Agreements, could not seize Phong Saly and Sam Neua provinces or defend Laos.

39. The army will remain totally dependent on foreign assistance during the period of this estimate. Progress in increasing the army's effectiveness will require an improvement in relations between French and Lao personnel. Moreover, the army cannot operate effectively unless the French supply sufficient airlift to transport and supply the units involved in operations.

V. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

40. The economy of Laos is essentially subsistent in nature. The small, predominantly rural population, using primitive methods, normally produces only enough rice to meet its minimum requirements. In addition, small quantities of tin, coffee, and tobacco are available for export. Transportation and communication facilities in Laos are primitive. Timber resources remain largely unexploited, and known mineral resources are small.

41. Total government revenues do not cover even the nonmilitary budget, which currently amounts to \$16,000,000. A chronic deficit also exists in the balance of payment position. Annual exports amount only to about \$2,000,000, while import requirements for textiles and other finished goods exceed \$10,000,000 each year. Prior to January 1955, the French provided sufficient assistance to balance the Laotian budget and international payments position, and to equip and support its army. Since this date, the US has assumed the French role. At present, the anticipated annual level of foreign aid, mostly provided by

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the US, approximates \$60,000,000 including more than \$40,000,000 for the military budget.

42. There is a current serious shortage of rice in Laos, estimated at 40,000 metric tons. It is the result of two successive droughts and the lingering effects of the Viet Minh invasions of 1953 and 1954. If arrangements for the triangular Japanese-Thai-US rice deal are soon completed, Thai rice will be distributed in Laos to alleviate this shortage.

43. Imports of consumer goods remain at a low level, although some improvements in trading and financing facilities have recently been made. In recent trade negotiations with Thailand, the Laotians gained agreement to the free transit of goods through Thailand. Moreover, completion of Thai rail facilities to link up with the Mekong River ferry near to Vientiane will establish a route with considerably lower freight costs than the present one through Saigon, and will decrease the present dependence of Laos on the Mekong River route for the transport of its foreign trade.

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VI. FOREIGN RELATIONS

44. Until the Geneva Conference, Franco-Lao relations were in general friendly. Laos was almost completely dependent on France for military and economic assistance, and for defense against Viet Minh incursions. Moreover, most of the unfavorable aspects of colonialism did not develop in Laos. Nonetheless, there were a number of Lao leaders who desired independence for their people. The collapse of French military power in Indochina and the US decision, following the Geneva Conference, to grant assistance directly to Laos, initially encouraged these nationalists to seek to reduce French influence radically. However, at present, Lao nationalist aspirations are tempered by awareness of the importance of the French military, economic, and cultural contribution to the country. There are no indications that Laotians desire to leave the French Union, and one of the objectives of the Katay government is to strengthen its friendly relations with France.

45. At the present time, France almost certainly desires to keep Laos within the French

Union in order to bolster claims of France to great power status and to ensure its participation in the making of Free World Asian policies. However, French policy towards Laos, particularly with respect to the problem posed by the Pathet Lao, is apparently seriously inhibited by a basic aversion to any measures that would involve greater expense to France or that would risk the involvement of its military forces in renewed hostilities. Consequently, it has advised the Lao government to refrain from using military force to break Pathet Lao resistance in the two provinces, and indicated that French troops would not participate in such an operation.

46. Although limited by the Geneva Agreements restrictions on military training assistance, the US has played a constantly growing role in Laos. Accordingly, Lao policy on all basic issues has been considerably influenced by its desire to receive US support.

47. Within the restraints set by US and other Western influences, Premier Katay, by dealing directly with Communist China and the DRV at Bandung, has sought to improve his position vis-a-vis the Pathet Lao and to lessen the threat of forceful Communist action. Premier Katay has reportedly indicated his approval of the Chou-Nehru "Five Principles." At the instance of the Indians and the Communist Chinese at the Bandung Conference, Katay joined in a declaration with DRV Foreign Minister Pham van Dong, upholding "good neighborly relations" between the two countries. There is, however, no indication that Katay intends to adopt a neutral position or that he plans to establish formal relations with the DRV or Communist China. We believe the Lao government will continue to follow these lines of policy during the period of this estimate.

48. Laos has followed a policy of maintaining correct diplomatic relations with all the major non-Communist Asia states. Its ties are closer with the pro-Western Asian nations than with the neutralist states. Several of the latter, however — Burma, Ceylon, India, and Indonesia — have now afforded Laos either *de jure* or *de facto* recognition.

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49. The Lao government has sought and achieved closer economic and political relations with Thailand. Although considerable resentment and suspicion of Thai meddling in Lao affairs beclouds to some extent the latter's attitude toward Thailand, relations between the two countries have improved. An economic agreement, favorable to Laos, has recently been concluded. The Thai government has also offered to assist in the training of Lao police. We believe relations between the two countries will continue to improve during the period of this estimate.

50. Indian-Lao relations have developed chiefly in the period since the Geneva Conference of 1954, largely under the stimulus of Indian chairmanship of the ICC. Failure to extend *de jure* recognition to Lao is due in part to Pathet Lao control in the two north-

ern provinces and in part to a question of the legitimacy of the Royal Lao government. Although the Indian government is aware that the Pathet Lao is supported by the DRV, the principal factors shaping Indian policy are a determination to avert hostilities and a desire to maintain an impartiality in keeping with the Indian position on the ICC. As a result of Indian attitudes, the political position of the Pathet Lao has been strengthened, the Communists have had time to strengthen their military forces, and Lao government efforts to establish control over the two northern provinces have been hampered. The Indian government will probably not change substantially its present policy toward Laos during the period of this estimate unless the Pathet Lao should clearly be the aggressor in a renewal of hostilities.

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